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THE ROAD TO A DURABLE PEACE

BY EDWARD A. FILENE,

Boston.

The world has become convinced that might is not right, but it has yet to learn that right is not might—at least, right is not mighty enough to insure its automatic triumph. Most of us are convinced that miracles do not happen in the affairs of men and nations, or that if they do they are no more the exclusive property of right than they are the exclusive property of might. If we read history in the light of facts rather than our wishes, we are forced to see that when left to themselves in an unregulated contest might triumphs over right more times than right triumphs over might, but right will always prevail, provided as much straight thinking is put into it and as much power put behind it as is given to the designs of might.

These principles are fundamental to any discussion of the forces of war and the forces of peace. This war is a dramatic illustration of what can happen when the force of the world is used to break law instead of to maintain it. History will probably regard the present war as essentially a conflict of social ideals. Two hundred years from now, this war will probably be referred to as the “Great Social War.”

I take it that most of us here believe that in this conflict of social ideals democracy with all of its shortcomings more nearly represents the right than does any other social or national ideal. And this war, to my mind, is proving that, so long as autocratic nations support their claims with force, the more democratic nations dare not trust for protection merely to their superior ideals. If democratic ideals are superior, we have no right to run any risk of their safety. We have not yet reached the time when an ideal will stop a bullet. Force without ideals is dangerous, but ideals without force are too often powerless. We have worked out the ideal of peace with clearness. The problem of our generation is to work out the machinery of peace with efficiency.

I conceive it, therefore, to be the duty of every democratic nation to be prepared adequately to defend its ideals against the

encroachment of autocratic might. But it is not easy to awaken an enthusiasm for preparedness in a democratic nation with its natural aversion to military power. The rank and file of American democracy, at least, fears that with an effective fighting force at hand there is the danger of a hasty yielding to the temptation of war. It may appeal to some as a weakness in a democracy that it does not respond more readily to the call of preparation for self-defense, but to my mind, just there lies the superiority of a democracy.

I am convinced that if with the preparedness movement there could be joined an international policy under which the economic and military forces of the United States would be dedicated not only to the cause of national defense but also to helping to maintain more permanent peace among nations, that millions of our citizens now opposed to the preparedness movement would become enthusiastic advocates of it.

The most pressing problem that the war has forced upon us as a nation is the problem of adequate national defense combined with a policy that will look towards the mobilizing of the economic and military force of all nations for the support of law rather than the breaking of law.

It is just such a policy that is advocated in the platform of the League to Enforce Peace, the central proposal of which advocates the establishment of an International Court and Council of Conciliation supported by a League of Nations agreeing to submit their differences thereto for examination before proceeding to make war; and further agreeing to use their combined force (first in the form of business and financial non-intercourse or in the form of military action if economic pressure proves ineffective) against any nation of the League that refuses to submit its difficulty for examination before making war.

The desire for some plan that will look toward an effective guarantee of more lasting peace among the nations is well nigh universal. In a democracy such as ours, the danger is that such desire will remain scattered, unorganized and therefore ineffective. The general public needs, above all things, unification of sentiment. The men of business, of labor, of agriculture and of government need a common standing ground from which to look into the future and to plan for a wise direction of its vital interests. Unless the scattered desires for more permanent peace can be fused into one great

national movement that shall capture not only the mind but the enthusiasm of the whole people, there is little hope that America will play its part in the reconstruction of human society at the end of the war. The program of the League to Enforce Peace, more than any other program, offers such a common ground.

It is not a program that gives complete satisfaction to the extreme pacifist or the extreme militarist. It agrees with the pacifist that the goal toward which America should work is that of lasting peace among the nations, but it insists that civilization has not yet reached and may never reach the point where force can be withdrawn as a sanction for law. It agrees with the militarist that public opinion must have force behind it before it can become effective in keeping the peace of the world, but it insists that the military preparedness of a nation should be used not merely in national defense but also in support of an international policy of law as against war for the settlement of disputes between nations.

None of us are sanguine enough to expect that any plan will eliminate the necessity for using force in the affairs of nations at least for some time to come, but we are confident that methods can be devised so that when force is used it will be used in the preservation of order rather than in the mutual destruction of the nations at difference just as within the nation police protection has taken the place of individual combat.

The following propositions, in my judgment, represent an accurate analysis of the present situation with reference to the preparedness movement and the duty of the United States toward the problem of more permanent world peace.

I. We need preparedness for national defense.

The instinct of self preservation is one of the fundamental forces of nature and when justly exercised in the defense of the individual or the nation cannot be adjudged other than moral.

II. We cannot get adequate preparedness unless we combine with it an international policy which will restrain its use for aggrandizement and will pledge its use to the maintenance of international law.

This is because of democracy's instinctive fear of the possible misuse of military power. A trip through the Great Middle West

will convince anyone that the rank and file of Americans are not in the mood to support a movement for a great military power dedicated solely to the cause of national defense. President Wilson accurately interpreted the American spirit when recently he said:

America will have forgotten her traditions, whenever, upon any occasion, she fights merely for herself under such circumstances as will show that she has forgotten to fight for all mankind. And the only excuse that America can ever have for the assertion of her physical force is that she asserts it in behalf of the interests of humanity. When America ceases to be unselfish, she will cease to be America. When she forgets the traditions of devotion to human rights in general which gave spirit and impulse to her founders, she will have lost her title deeds to her own nationality.

This high tradition of unselfishness indicates that America will respond to any movement for preparedness if it be dedicated not only to national but to international interests at one and the same time.

III. The Democratic instinct thus proves itself sound, because in the long run an unselfish international policy will result in the best possible selfish protection.

IV. Without an international policy that makes peace more lasting, the nations of Europe must enter another race for armaments which, together with their war debts and the rebuilding of their industries, will create an urgent need for money that will force them to institute a destructive competition for markets that will react against the progress of democracy by complicating all of our fundamental problems.

If, at the end of the war, no method but war is left for the settlement of the inevitable disputes that will arise between nations, Europe will be driven to institute this race for markets in order to prepare herself for the next war, and the probable effect of such a race for markets upon our American problems will be as follows:

a. *Our Export Problem*

Our foreign markets will be greatly narrowed and in some lines closed by the reduced power to buy on the part of the European nations. Indirectly, the power to buy will be reduced among other nations. Our foreign markets will be further restricted by the high protective tariffs which the European nations will maintain at the

close of the war, first, as a method of securing greater income and second, as a method of making each nation as nearly self-sufficient as possible, for self-sufficiency is a great military asset.

b. *Our Tariff Problem*

It will be suggested that we can meet such a situation by erecting high tariff walls. But in many cases nothing short of a prohibitory tariff will meet the situation, and a prohibitory tariff would result, first, in a serious reduction of our governmental income, and second, would further restrict our export trade, because between nations as between individuals it takes two to make a trade. Therefore, any serious restrictions on our imports would, in the long run, limit our exports.

c. *Our Taxation Problem*

If the urgency of the situation should force us to a high protective tariff, our income would be so seriously reduced that we would face great deficits. These deficits would suggest an increasing amount of direct taxation, and efforts at direct taxation invariably produce violent protest and serious class strife. Throughout history, nations have gone down in efforts to levy direct taxes to the satisfaction of all classes.

d. *Our Labor Problem*

If Europe throws upon our markets vast amounts of goods produced by labor that for patriotic reasons accepts abnormally low wages, it is clear that the higher wages of American labor will be thrown into a serious competition. There is, I know, a disposition upon the part of some to believe that labor will be so scarce in Europe at the end of the war that European wages will be kept up. But it must be remembered that to an unprecedented degree women have been drafted into the industrial army of Europe, and that every year a vast number of boys are entering manhood and becoming available for industry. There is reason to believe that more labor will be available at the close of the war than before.

In addition, the intensity of this unprecedented and relentless commercial competition will divert public thought and energy from the fundamental problems of social progress. And this would mean an intensifying of our class strife and labor difficulties.

All this presents a grave outlook but it must be remembered

that if at the end of this war some method other than war can be established for the settlement of future disputes that Europe will be relieved to some extent of this abnormally urgent need of money and therefore America can escape this complication of her problems.

V. In addition to material defense, a policy of preparedness for national defense as a means toward international peace can be made the centre around which will gather a national movement in which may be awakened in Americans new ideals and new loyalties and new ambitions such as the Europeans are gaining as a sort of by-product of the sacrifice and suffering of war.

Along this road lies the purest approach to a durable peace. If we will follow it, as I feel sure we will, our high confidence in democratic institutions and in the destiny of America will be justified.